



United States Department of Defense

Speech

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Pentagon Memorial Ceremony

Remarks by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, The Pentagon, September 11, 2002.

President Bush, Mrs. Bush, members of Congress and the Cabinet, distinguished foreign guests, family members, General Myers and the Pentagon family, welcome. We're here today to honor those who died in this place and to rededicate ourselves to the cause for which they gave their lives, the cause of human liberty.

In a sense, we meet on a battlefield. If it does not appear so today, that is because of the singular devotion of the men and women who worked day and night to fulfill a solemn vow that not one stone of this building would be out of place on this anniversary. We thank you for your dedication and your accomplishment. (Applause.)

But one year ago, this was a battle zone, a scene of billowing smoke, towering flames, broken rock, and twisted metal. It says much about our nation and the fierceness and resilience of the American people that were we not here now in this solemn ceremony, a visitor passing would see no hint of the terrible events that took place here but one year ago today.

But we must not forget what happened here. Dedicated men and women came here on a clear September morning to serve their country, and then, in an instant were taken from us. We gather today to remember them, but we're here for another purpose as well; to mark that first anniversary of a day that will be remembered by history and commemorated by successive generations so long as we remain free people. For a battle was joined on that day -- a battle still unfolding between a nation of free people and forces that seek to plunge that nation and, indeed, the free world into the darkness of tyranny and terror. We assemble today to ask what has been accomplished in the name of those who died and on behalf of those who lived.

One month after the attacks, our commander-in-chief came here to the Pentagon to speak to us, to console us and to encourage us for the struggle still ahead. Of the terrorists, Mr. President, you said

they dwell in dark corners. With patience, the terrorists will be pursued; they will be isolated, surrounded until there's no place to run, to hide or to rest.

Well, to the men and women of the armed forces, this you are doing. In Afghanistan you have rescued a country and liberated a people. You have rooted the terrorists out of the caves and the shadows. You are performing heroically. Know that the American people value what you do for our country. (Applause.)

In this past year, some of your comrades have given their lives in the defense of freedom, and we remember each of them today. And to their families, we offer our sympathy and thank you for the love of country that you instilled in each of those extraordinary human beings. And we remember in our prayers each of the allied soldiers who have fallen on the field of battle. From the first moments of this struggle, America knew she was not alone. Support came from every corner of the world.

Mr. President, the coalition you have assembled is truly remarkable. Some 90 nations -- literally half of the world -- have joined in this effort, the greatest military coalition ever assembled in human history. Many coalition partners are here today, and we say to you, thank you for standing with us. (Applause.) And please extend our gratitude to your fellow citizens. Tell them how much we value their friendship and their steadfastness.

In the past year we've been awakened to our vulnerabilities, made conscious of the dangers we face in this new century. That awakening came at a terrible price.

But the terrorists aspire to even greater destruction. Unless they are stopped, the light of history will fade from this day, turning its gaze instead to subsequent days, when not thousands but tens of thousands of lives could be lost.

The road ahead is long. But while we have not yet achieved victory, we know, in one important sense, that the terrorists who attacked us have already been defeated. They were defeated before the first shot was fired in Afghanistan. They were defeated because they failed utterly to achieve their objectives. The terrorists wanted September 11th to be a day when innocents died. Instead it was a day when heroes were born. The terrorists wanted September 11th to be a day when hatred reigned. Instead it was a day when we witnessed love beyond measure.

We saw it in the rescue workers who rushed into burning buildings to save lives, knowing they might never emerge. We saw it in the passengers on Flight 93, who learned what was happening and decided it was better to fight and die in a grassy Pennsylvania field than allow the terrorists to reach our nation's capital. And we've seen it every day since, in the service of those who have risked their lives and given their lives to stop terrorism.

The terrorists wanted September 11th to be a day when free people learned fear and self-doubt. Instead it was a day when a sleeping patriotism was awakened in this country. Even as they wiped away their

tears, Americans unfurled their flags. They flew them from seemingly every house and car, in schools and parks and playing fields. And in town squares all across the nation, citizens gathered to light candles and to pray.

The fruits of September 11th were not hatred, fear or self-doubt, as the terrorists intended. They were charity and courage, patience and perseverance. We have cause for hope, because we have seen evil reveal itself in our midst and then watched it humbled by the power of simple goodness. From the construction workers who rebuilt this wounded building, stone by stone, to those wounded here, who have inspired our nation with their courageous struggle to recover, to the thousands of schoolchildren who sent pictures to comfort us and to lift our spirits -- and they did lift our spirits -- the American people responded in ways that stir the soul.

Many Americans ask, "What can we do to help?" The answer is you have helped. You've prayed, you've volunteered, you've given your sons and daughters to defend our freedom.

We will win this war on terror. We will win, no matter how long or hard or difficult or costly it is. One day our grandchildren will look back on this time and ask, "How was the war on terror won?" And we will tell them about the brave men and women who gave their lives so that we could live in freedom. We remember them today, and to their families, many of whom are here, know that we have not forgotten. But let us do more than remember. The greatest honor we can bestow on them, the best memorial we can fashion for them is to protect our liberty and secure it for generations to come. That is our charge, that is our responsibility.

May God bless our nation in the struggle ahead. (Applause.)

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